

Fighting For Freedom

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July 2004

No other date on the calendar more potently symbolizes all that our nation stands for than the Fourth of July. It has now been 228 years since our forefathers declared independence and committed themselves to securing the blessings of liberty for themselves and their posterity.

The odds were certainly against those revolutionaries. They endured many hardships - some lost everything they had - and, yet, they persevered, and they prevailed. For more than two centuries since winning our own freedom, we the people of the United States have repeatedly answered the call to lead the quest for freedom around the globe.

Recent events in Iraq have offered us jarring reminders that victory does not come easily even for the noblest of causes. However, some other recent events offer us encouraging reminders that we have overcome other daunting challenges before and have been rewarded for maintaining our resolve even when things looked bleak.

In May, the long-awaited World War II Memorial in Washington D.C. opened. Walking through the Memorial the first time, I felt tremendous gratitude to that "Greatest Generation" who stood strong against tyranny and not only defended our freedom, but rescued so many other peoples.

Also in May, I attended two moving Memorial Day events. Special recognition was given to the families of those from our area who lost their lives in Iraq. Air Force Captain Eric Das and Marine Lance Corporal Aaron Austin were two young men who, in words used by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "stand in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live and grow and increase its blessings."

On June 6, we paused to remember one of the most significant battles of World War II: D-Day. In observances in the United States and France and elsewhere, we took time to recall the valor of the soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy sixty years ago. Thousands of brave fighters were lost in the D-Day effort, but thanks to their courage Nazism was soon to be dispatched to the ash heap of history.

The day before the anniversary of D-Day, we lost a man who was equaled by few and surpassed by none as a leader in the cause of freedom: Ronald Reagan. For a week after the passing of our former President, we were all given an opportunity to remember how he rallied us to overcome the threat of Soviet dominance. Pages and pages have been and will be written describing how Ronald Reagan helped defeat the Soviet Union and end the Cold War. Let me offer this short synopsis of his indispensable contribution: Ronald Reagan was one of those very rare leaders who had the courage to call evil "evil" and remain confident that it would be overcome.

In the War on Terror, we are again combating evil. We have suffered some setbacks, but we are also making significant progress. The message delivered by a recent visitor to Capitol Hill underscores the essential role Americans continue to play in the quest for liberty for all mankind. A couple of weeks ago, a joint assembly of the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate received the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai.

This man, who has been the target of numerous assassination attempts, cited a litany of achievements since U.S. forces helped overthrow the brutal Taliban regime. Over 5 million Afghan boys and girls are attending school. New health centers are in operation providing basic services to the citizens. Goods are being transported on reconstructed roads. In the past two years, 3 million refugees have returned home to Afghanistan. Most importantly, he is working with us to kill or capture the remaining terrorists and to see that Afghanistan is never used as a global terrorist haven again.

As impressive as these accomplishments are, it was especially uplifting to know that President Karzai fully recognizes and appreciates what our nation has done. Very early in his speech to Congress he expressed his gratitude with these words:

"I thank you and the people of this great country for your generosity and commitment to our people. You have supported us with your resources, with your leadership in the world community and, most importantly, with the precious lives of your soldiers."

The opening of the new World War II Memorial, the local Memorial Day ceremonies, the observance of the D-Day Anniversary, the remembrance of President Reagan's legacy, and the speech by President Karzai have all reminded me how magnificently Americans have spread the "Spirit of '76" around the globe. We have every right to be proud of our great nation.

God Bless America this Fourth of July!